

**TDSB Urban Aboriginal Education Project  
Update, June 2, 2010**

The TDSB Urban Aboriginal Education Project continues to be guided by priorities in the following 5 areas:

**Student Support      Partnerships      Curriculum      Professional Development      Community Engagement**

Since our last report our work in each area has developed distinct features, the highlights of which will be briefly summarized here. It is important to review who the staff are that are doing this work and what TDSB's current staff commitment is aside from UAEP funded staff. It is also important to mention that full staffing of the UAEP positions was not achieved until the second half of this school year. Review of hiring processes in light of the experience of this project is essential. The final important context is the sheer size of the Toronto District. 257,000 students in 595 highly diverse schools create an enormous challenge in finding and effectively supporting Aboriginal students.

**Urban Aboriginal Education Project Staff**

1 Program Coordinator  
2 Itinerant Student Success teachers  
1 Social Worker  
1 Child and Youth Counselor  
1 Community Liaison Worker  
.5 Facilitator, Tutor/Mentoring

**TDSB Core Aboriginal Education Centre Staff**

1 Central Coordinating Principal  
1 Instructional Leader, Aboriginal Education  
1 Community Liaison Worker  
1 Office Assistant

Together this staff currently services a diverse and widespread Aboriginal student, parent and school community. They teach, counsel and advocate. They provide professional development and mentoring for the system, schools, departments, teams and individual teachers and support staff. They develop curriculum, build partnerships internally and externally and engage the community in the education of their children.

**Student Support:**

- The Student Support Referral rate to our teaching and counseling staff continues to increase as more schools, students and families learn about our services. Direct student support and related consultation accounts for the majority of the staff time of our teachers and counselors. We are now working in over 100 schools with individual students and groups of students providing academic and counseling support as well as opportunities to connect with Aboriginal resources, cultural activities, events and other students.
- Attendance, transition issues and access to alternative programs and credits define much of our work and this has resulted in developing innovative processes and individual and group solutions for many of the Aboriginal secondary students we work with. These include full and part time coop placements, modified school days and alternative placement at the Aboriginal Education Centre.
- Helping students access food, housing, textbooks, transportation, and volunteer and employment opportunities underlines some of the basic needs that must be met for many students to continue their education.
- The hiring of a Tutor/Mentor Facilitator has laid the groundwork for a range of tutor/mentoring support for secondary and elementary students
- Supportive girls' and young women's groups are organized at several schools where there are larger numbers of Aboriginal students.

**Curriculum:**

- The Aboriginal Education Centre library collection has been greatly enhanced this year and is now catalogued and available to Toronto District School board staff.
- Resource Guides and teaching materials continue to be developed and revised for activities around Aboriginal Education Month, Louis Riel Day, Aboriginal Veteran's Day and National Aboriginal Day
- 6 new literature based curriculum units for elementary students have been recently developed.
- Curriculum lessons and units are being developed based on the experiences of the Arts Based partnership with ANDPVA
- Secondary curriculum writing continues and summer writing projects are planned.

**Professional Development:**

- Increased support for Native Languages, Cultures and Traditions Professional Learning Community included opportunities and funding to attend conferences and release time for observation, professional development and meetings.
- Implemented Restorative Justice training for Aboriginal Education Centre staff, and a network of staff from Safe Schools, Social Work, Child and Youth Counseling and Guidance
- Two full days of Professional Development organized and presented by UAEP staff were provided to participating teachers and one day to artists in the Aboriginal Arts Based Project
- Support and facilitation for the newly created TDSB First Nation, Métis and Inuit Staff Network resulted in a growing number of Aboriginal staff self-identifying and attending the meetings of this group. A delegation from this group of First Nation, Métis and Inuit teachers, principals and support staff presented a brief to the TDSB 'Achievement Gap' task force hearings.
- UAEP staff were supported in attending and/or presenting at a number of conferences and professional development opportunities
- Targeted professional development is being planned again this year for a variety of TDSB summer institutes (beginning teachers, new administrators, Equity etc)

**Partnerships:**

- Postsecondary partnerships have resulted in the successful completion of a York University Credit Course in Aboriginal People, Identity and Education, participation in a George Brown College Pathways for Aboriginal High School Students Orientation, Humber College Aboriginal Camp and establishment of collaborative relationships with Toronto Post Secondary institutions in establishing a Tutor/Mentoring program.
- Partnerships with the First Nation, Métis and Inuit arts community have resulted in a 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Aboriginal Arts Based Project involving 1000 students in 20 schools, a special screening of 'Reel Injun' for TDSB students, and access to fully funded Aboriginal 'Prologue for the Performing Arts' performances in 11 schools.
- UAEP support for the Aboriginal Seniors Literacy Project has brought Aboriginal Seniors into two elementary schools on a twice weekly to read and talk with First Nation, Métis and Inuit students
- Partnerships with FoodshareToronto have resulted in employment and placement opportunities for students and access to low cost healthy food for many.
- Partnerships within the Toronto District School Board have resulted in a number of exciting initiatives and much groundwork for the future. These include a full and part time Theatre Arts Coop program resulting in a production exploring Aboriginal themes and issues, a partnership with the Guidance Department in implementing Guiding Circles ( an Aboriginal Career Guidance Program) and leadership in training and implementation of Restorative Justice Practices.
- Partnerships with a number of Aboriginal Agencies have resulted in not only a series of cultural events and camps that our students can access but also after school programs like, ' Harmony of the Drum' and 7 Grandfather Teachings , a partnership with Toronto Council Fire.

**Community Engagement:**

- Intensive one to one and small group Student Support has resulted in extensive engagement with parents and caregivers around the needs of their children. UAEP staff have not only become a liaison to schools for these parents but also a link to other Aboriginal services and members of the community. A growing number of parents and caregivers use the Aboriginal Education Centre as a cultural as well as educational resource
- A series of planned parent and family activities, workshops, courses and training has been developed for implementation in partnership with TDSB Parent and Community Involvement Office and Continuing Education. UAEP is supporting a family Ojibwe language program in two of our schools and has planned activities for Aboriginal parents and community members centering on health, gardening, leadership, volunteering, arts, cooking and film.
- The majority of the Aboriginal Education Centre staff are First Nation, Métis or Inuit. UAEP staff are active in the larger Aboriginal community and agencies as parents, participants, committee members, and partners. Even in a Board as large as Toronto this is an important and visible indication of a holistic commitment and one which invites engagement and trust.

**Summary:**

There are observations, learned or confirmed, that have served to focus and define our work even further in the past months.

- Willingness to self-identify is related directly to the availability of appropriate resources, programs and staff allocated to Aboriginal Education
- First Nation, Métis and Inuit students are in many more schools than our current demographic data would indicate.
- There is continuing evidence that the residential school legacy affects the community's relationship with the school system and education and our staff and programs are vital in creating links and building trust.
- Support for attendance issues, support in accessing food, shelter, transportation and access to alternative programs and credits are strong needs for many Aboriginal secondary students
- Unique support is needed for the transition from the reserve, or First Nations communities which older students are often making alone.
- Student Success, School Support, Social Work, Guidance teams, classroom teachers and school administrators are eager for more information and support to work with Aboriginal students.
- The Student Support Referral rate to the Aboriginal Education Centre continues to increase as schools and families learn about our services. Meeting the need with current staff requires innovative solutions and collaboration with other professionals.
- Sharing leadership in initiatives like Restorative Justice and Guiding Circles maintains the important Aboriginal perspective inherent in these approaches.
- Providing specific post secondary experiences for Aboriginal students in partnership with colleges and universities is effective in building confidence and cultivating broader expectations in Aboriginal secondary students
- By bringing together Aboriginal students in camps, activity groups, cultural activities, events, learning symposiums and system wide projects the Urban Aboriginal Education Project not only promotes culture and learning, but assists in building friendships, confidence and resiliency and alleviates isolation by creating supportive, inclusive environments and communities of peers.
- Current TDSB hiring protocols lengthen and complicate the hiring process considerably when seeking qualified Aboriginal candidates.

As the Urban Aboriginal Education Project funding and support draw to a close the task remains in the next months to reflect on what we have learned, what practices are effective and how will School Boards implement change. As the research is further compiled, the data gathered and interpreted, it is clear our practices are different than they were before and that a gap in service, particularly Student Support, while we wait for conclusions, would be a great loss for many Aboriginal students and families. TDSB has now committed to supporting some continuation of UAEP staff positions for the next year. Currently the UAEP Toronto Steering Subcommittee is waiting to meet with the Director and senior staff to continue this conversation, looking further into the future.